

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PHNOM 02129 040826Z

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, PFOR, MOPS, CB, US

SUBJ: ASSESSMENT OF WHERE WE STAND IN CAMBODIA AS OF FEBRUARY 4.

1. IN SEPTEMBER OF LAST YEAR, WHILE IN WASHINGTON ON CONSULTATION, I STRESSED IN A MEMORANDUM ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY THE NEED FOR FINDING "A CONTROLLED SOLUTION" AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE TO THE KHMER CONFLICT. IN THAT MEMORANDUM I WROTE THAT "IF NO SOLUTION IS FOUND, THEN WE MUST BE PREPARED FOR AN UNCONTROLLED DENOUEMENT TO THE KHMER DRAMA AS US MILITARY AND ECONOMIC FUNDS RUN OUT, THE US MISSION IS WITHDRAWN AND THE GKR AND FANK DISINTEGRATE. UNDER THE LATTER CIRCUMSTANCES, A BLOODBATH CANNOT BE RULED OUT. THE IMPACT OF SUCH AN ENDING TO THE CAMBODIAN CONFLICT ON THE US IMAGE AND ON THE POLICY OF THE UNITED STATES AND FOREIGN STATES GOES WELL BEYOND INDOCHINA." FIVE MONTHS AFTER I WROTE THIS REALISTIC ASSESSMENT (AND IN WHICH I ALSO MADE SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO DEAL WITH THIS CONTINGENCY) I CANNOT RULE OUT THREE SITUATIONS DEVELOPING IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE WHICH COULD LEAD TO THE KIND OF UNCONTROLLED DENOUEMENT TO THE KHMER CONFLICT I DISCUSSED IN SEPTEMBER:

A. REFUSAL BY CONGRESS TO AUTHORIZE NEEDED SUPPLEMENTAL MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE.

B. FANK'S FAILURE TO BREAK THE KC BLOCKADE OF THE MEKONG, THEREBY PREVENTING RESUPPLY OF THE KHMER
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 PHNOM 02129 040826Z

CAPITAL BY RIVER.

C. THE WANING STRENGTH OF THE FANK, PARTICULARLY NORTH OF PHNOM PENH WHERE THE 7TH DIVISION MAY BE UNABLE TO CONTAIN THE ENEMY. THIS COULD LEAD TO A RATHER SUDDEN COLLAPSE OF THE NORTHERN FRONT WITH RESULTING PANIC IN THE CAPITAL.

2. THERE IS LITTLE WE CAN DO HERE TO ASSIST THE ADMINISTRATION IN ITS EFFORT TO OBTAIN THE NECESSARY ADDITIONAL FUNDS FROM CONGRESS, EXCEPT TO ENCOURAGE THE GKR AND FANK TO CONTINUE IN MORE EFFECTIVE FASHION WHAT THEY ARE DOING RIGHT NOW. IF THE ADMINISTRATION IS UNSUCCESSFUL IN OBTAINING ADDITIONAL FUNDS FOR CAMBODIA, PARTICULARLY MILITARY ASSISTANCE, WE CAN EXPECT GKR MORALE TO COLLAPSE WITHIN A RELATIVELY SHORT PERIOD OF TIME AND THE KHMER GOVERNMENTAL AND MILITARY STRUCTURE TO BEGIN UNRAVELLING.

3. THE MINING OF THE MEKONG RIVER RESULTING IN SUBSTANTIAL LOSSES OF DOWNRIVER CONVOY VESSELS YESTERDAY, FEB 3, HAS AGAIN RAISED THE SPECTRE OF THE KC SUCCESSFULLY INTERDICTING NAVIGATION ON THE MEKONG, EITHER MILITARILY BY SINKING A LARGE PERCENTAGE OF THE VESSELS OR PSYCHOLOGICALLY BY DISCOURAGING CIVILIAN CREWS AND CAPTAINS FROM SAILING UP THE MEKONG. TOMORROW, FEB 5, GENERAL HUNT WILL AGAIN TRY TO PUNCH THROUGH TWO AMMUNITION BARGES WITH HEAVY AIR COVER AND KHMER MINESWEEPERS OUT IN FRONT, HOPEFULLY ELIMINATING THE MINES WHICH DID SO MUCH DAMAGE TO YESTERDAY'S DOWNSTREAM CONVOY. IF THESE TWO AMMUNITION BARGES CAN COME UP TO PHNOM PENH, PERHAPS OTHER CREWS WILL THEN BE WILLING AGAIN TO MAN THE BARGES AND TUGS WHICH NEED TO COME UP THE MEKONG. THE DECISION BY LLOYDS OF LONDON TO CANCEL ALL INSURANCE POLICIES FOR ASSETS USED UPSTREAM TO PHNOM PENH IS DISCUSSED IN SAIGON 1279, AS WELL AS POSSIBLE OPTIONS OPEN TO US IF WE ARE TO CONTINUE KEEPING VESSELS COMING UP THE MEKONG RIVER. WE WILL DO ALL WE CAN TO GET THE KHMER NAVY TO PROTECT THE CONVOYS, AND TO HAVE THEM HOLD ON TO THE KEY CHOKE POINTS ON THE MEKONG WHERE FANK TROOPS ARE PRESENTLY UNDER HEAVY PRESSURE FROM THE ENEMY.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PHNOM 02129 040826Z

WITHIN A FEW DAYS WE WILL SEE WHETHER THE MEKONG CAN BE KEPT OPEN AND ALSO WHETHER WE HAVE THE MONEY TO INSURE THE SHIPS OR TO PURCHASE TUGS FOR THE GKR AND HAVE THEM MANNED BY KHMER CREWS.

4. THE FRONT NORTH OF PHNOM PENH IS MANNED BY A VERY TIRED 7TH DIVISION, WHICH IS ALSO EXPERIENCING SOME LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS. IF THE ENEMY MAKES SOME LUCKY ATTACK

WHICH RESULTS IN FRIENDLY TROOPS ABANDONING THE BATTLE-FIELD, THIS COULD BRING THE ENEMY WITHIN 3 OR 4 KILOMETERS OF THE CITY PROPER. HE IS NOW ABOUT 7-8 KILOMETERS NORTH OF PHNOM PENH. FANK HAS TROUBLE GETTING RECRUITS TO FILL UP THE COMBAT UNITS AND THE ENEMY IS APPLYING PRESSURE SIMULTANEOUSLY AT DIFFERENT POINTS, THEREBY PREVENTING FANK FROM SHIFTING FORCES TO THE NORTHERN BATTLEFIELD FROM OTHER FRONTS IN THE KHMER REPUBLIC.

5. WHILE THE THREE "WORST CASE" POSSIBILITIES MENTIONED ABOVE ARE ONLY HYPOTHESES, AND WHILE WE WILL CONTINUE TO DO ALL IN OUR POWER TO AVOID THEM, STILL THE GKR SITUATION IS A VOLATILE ONE THAT CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE DECISION MAKING AND APPROPRIATE IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS. THE OBVIOUS CONCLUSION TO BE DRAWN FROM THIS REALISTIC ASSESSMENT IS TO PRESS AHEAD RAPIDLY WITH ANYTHING WE MIGHT BE DOING OR CONTEMPLATING REGARDING CONTACTING THE ADVERSARY, SO THAT WE CAN HAVE SOME VOICE IN WORKING OUT THE TERMS OF THE DENOUEMENT. I SHOULD THINK THAT RESORTING TO OPERATION EAGLE PULL AND LEAVING THE KHMERS TO THEIR OWN FATE IS NOT WORTHY OF THE EFFORT WE HAVE MADE HERE OVER THE LAST 5 YEARS, NOR OF THE MORAL VALUES FOR WHICH WE STAND.

6. I HAVE SHARED MY THOUGHTS ON THIS SUBJECT WITH THE SENIOR REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL ELEMENTS OF THE PHNOM PENH MISSION AND THEY HAVE EXPRESSED UNANIMOUS CONCURRENCE WITH THEM.
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